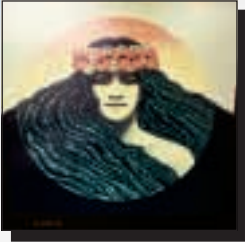


Soldiers

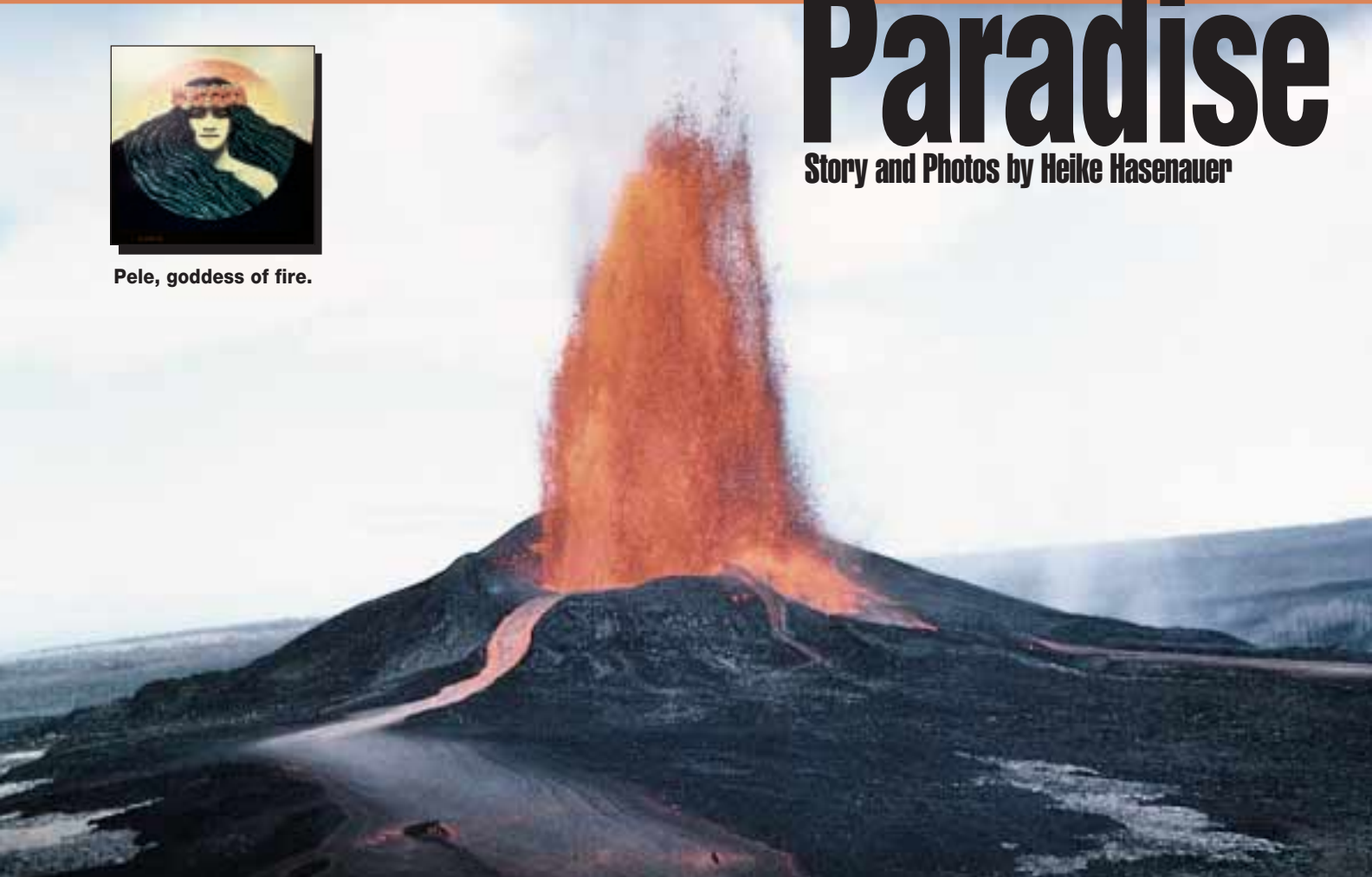
Online

Volcano-Country Paradise

Story and Photos by Heike Hasenauer



Pele, goddess of fire.



KILAUEA Military Camp, a joint-services recreation center inside Hawaii Volcanoes National Park on the island of Hawaii, welcomes visitors to experience the sights and sounds of the “Land of Fire and Ice” at the doorstep of one of the world’s most active volcanoes — Kilauea.

The Kilauea visitor center is on the island’s eastern side, about an hour from Hilo International Airport, on Highway 11. KMC is located just down the road, on Kilauea Summit, 4,000 feet above sea level.

The camp accommodates some 30,000 guests a year, said KMC director Randy Hart. “They come to see nature at its best. Here, you can

peer down mysterious lava tubes and hike over dramatic, lunar-like landscapes,” Hart said.

The national park displays the results of 70 million years of volcanic activity and the transformation caused by the drift of the earth’s crust along the Pacific Plate, a U.S. National Park Service spokesman said.

Scientists at the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory have made Kilauea one of the best-understood volcanoes in the world. In so doing, they say, they’ve increased knowledge about the formation of the Hawaiian Islands and the beginnings of our planet.

In geological terms, Kilauea is a baby volcano, only about one million years old, said KMC tour-guide Jerry

Medeiros, who was born and raised on the island. Visitors, however, needn’t fear being caught in a violent eruption on Kilauea. Because the volcano is so young, it has a brittle crust that allows magma beneath the surface to escape and thus release pressure.

“Even though we sit on the volcano, it doesn’t have the propensity to explode,” added Hart. “Lava typically flows down the southwest ridge zone, several miles from here.

“I’ve been here since 1989, and lava has fountained only once since then,” he said. An earlier vent fountained some 1,500 feet into the air

(Background) Kilauea erupts at Pu’u O’o on June 30, 1984.

J.D. Griggs, USGS

near KMC in 1983. Camp employees rang a bell to rally guests aboard a waiting bus to see it.

KMC offers a number of narrated tours, both inside the national park and elsewhere on the island. Your first stop should be the visitor center, for an orientation of the park and Hawaii's volcano history, said KMC marketing and sales representative Francine Bergeron.

It's the first stop on KMC's Volcano Chain of Craters Road Tour. The tour is a 40-mile round-trip drive that takes visitors on a descent 3,700 feet to the coast and dead-ends at a lava flow across the road.

Here, black lava fingers, cracked and wrinkly, snake down mountainsides, stopping abruptly at the edges of winding Chain of Craters Road, along Kilauea's east rift zone.

All around, wispy white steam clouds spew up like ghosts from the craters' vents. And, by the sea, fiery orange lava races down to meet the salty Pacific, sizzling into the cold brine, sending giant plumes of hydrochloric acid mist shooting into the sky.

Another tour, the 11-mile Crater Rim Drive Tour, circles Kilauea's summit caldera and craters, and passes through rain forest and desert.

It can occasionally be rainy and

chilly on the summit, so serious adventurers should bring a windbreaker, umbrella, long pants and closed-toe shoes.

Hawaii Volcanoes National Park — established in 1916 as America's 13th national park — is home to two of the world's most active volcanoes, Kilauea, Hawaii's youngest mountain, and 13,677-foot Mauna Loa, the world's highest active volcano and the most massive mountain on earth, at 18,000 cubic miles, scientists say.

Though Kilauea rose from the sea more than 100,000 years ago, it continues to erupt, adding new land to the island. Between 1983 and 1988, eruptions added 100 acres of new land, scientists report.

In the 20th century, Kilauea's most notable eruptions occurred in 1924 and in 1952, when the pyrotechnic-like light show stunned visitors for 136 continuous days, said volcanologists at Hawaii Volcano Observatory.

"If you're a young soldier and you want to see beaches and bikinis, go to Waikiki, on Oahu," said SPC George Scott, a National Guard soldier assigned to the Texas-based 49th Armored Division that's now leading the

task force in Bosnia.

Scott, who recently visited KMC with his wife, Patsy, to celebrate their wedding anniversary, said, "The environment here is much more relaxing and thought-provoking."

Bus tours depart almost daily for excursions around the Volcano Chain of Craters — where new eruptions are most likely to occur — to Kilauea Visitor Center and Volcano Art Center Gallery — in what was the first hotel built near the volcano, the former Volcano House Hotel.

Nearby is the tiny village of Volcano, with its half-dozen shops, including an island crafts store and old-fashioned grocery. A down-home-type restaurant features a host of homemade entrees and desserts.



A tour through the national park reveals many wonders, among them lava tubes like this one.



Visitors to Hawaii Volcanoes National Park can visit Kilauea Caldera, the collapsed summit of one of the park's two active volcanoes.



Volcano Winery, just beyond Volcano Golf Course, at the end of Pi'i Mauna Drive — sometimes called Golf Course Road — is a family run winery that specializes in “unique” wines made from 100 percent tropical honey and fruit blends, said owner Doc McKinney. Favorites include Macadamia Nut Honey, Volcano Blush and Guava Chablis.

Nothing on the island is more than



Sea turtles can often be seen on the black sand beaches near KMC.

a two-and-a-half-hour drive away, and the attractions are many, said Bergeron. KMC's Circle Island Tour is a 10-hour excursion around the island to see everything from the Punaluu Black Sand Beach, with its giant sun-basking sea turtles, to the island's highest waterfall, Akaka Falls, and the famed Mauna Loa Macadamia Nut Factory, which exports its sweet treats worldwide.

From Hilo, the island's largest city, visitors can reach Hawaii Tropical Botanical Garden by following signs to the “Scenic Route” at Onomea Bay. The gardens are located 7 miles north of Hilo, off Highway 19. Be sure to exit on the scenic route. Another botanical garden has a huge sign off the left of the roadway to lure tourists there instead. It's called the World Botanical Gardens.

While it also offers beautiful plants and foliage, it is a developing garden situated on 300 acres of former sugar-cane fields. The site's triple-tier Umauma Falls are worth visiting, as are the gardens, but it can't compare in size, variety of plants or beauty to the larger botanical garden.

The 40-acre Hawaii Tropical Botanical Garden has been described as a “tamed jungle, edged by the Pacific Ocean.” A “place of uncommon beauty and serenity,” it includes 2,000 species of rare and exotic plants.

While KMC offers a wide variety of bus tours, it can also book helicopter tours at reduced rates

through commercial tour agencies. It can also loan out scuba gear, bicycles and other outdoor recreation equipment, and help you plan excursions to the other islands. Inter-island and mainland air packages are also available with stops in Honolulu.

The resort boasts 77 tastefully decorated one-, two- and three-bedroom cabins, (some with jacuzzis) and one-, two-, three- and four-bedroom apartments. Handicapped-accessible units are also available.

All units include a fireplace, cable TV, telephone, refrigerator and coffee maker.

Additionally, KMC has its own cafeteria, general store, post office, recreation lodge, fitness center, bowling alley, lounge, banquet hall,



(Above and right) KMC offers a variety of comfortable accommodations complete with all the comforts of home. All have fireplaces, color cable TVs and phones.

(Top) A wide variety of exotic tropical plants thrive in their natural habitats at Hawaii Tropical Botanical Garden.

laundromat and weight room, among other amenities, said Bergeron.

The camp — undergoing a \$5.5 million facelift scheduled to end this summer — offers affordable daily rates and cost-saving package deals. Daily rates are as low as \$42 for an apartment for enlisted soldiers, to \$53 for NCOs, lieutenants and captains; \$65 for majors and colonels, and \$69 for higher-ranking personnel.

Costs for four-day, three-night stays that include transportation from and to Hilo International Airport, plus three breakfasts, one lunch and three dinners, are based on rank and type of accommodations, Bergeron said.

Privates through sergeants can pay from \$138 to \$160 for the package deal, based on double occupancy. Two-bedroom cottages with kitchens are available for guests who prefer to prepare their own meals.

Reservations may be made up to one year in advance, and priority is given to active-duty military personnel.

Active-duty and reserve-component military and retirees and Defense Department civilians are eligible to stay at KMC.



Akaka Falls — Hawaii's highest waterfall.

Contact the reservation office for availability and exact costs at (808) 967-8333, or write them for more information at:

KMC Lodging
Attention: Reservation Office,
Hawaii National Park, HI 96718.

